

Dear Families and Friends of the Talons,

Greetings to all from FOB Kalsu. AO Normanady is a different place than last month, because we make progress every day, thanks to our Soldiers and leaders.

I want to thank everyone for their support, generosity and letters; I cannot describe how much this means to the Soldiers. Having the support of such wonderful people is truly a base from which we continue to operate.

I realize you may at times receive mixed messages on how things are going in Iraq. What you see in the news doesn't quite match what you hear from your Soldier, the battalion, or the FRG. I will leave it to you to discern what is going on from these multiple inputs. However, I ask that you continue to trust the efforts of our nation, our President, and our magnificent Soldiers. Despite what is presented on TV, our Soldiers are the best in the world. They prove it every day, from individual interactions to battalion level operations. We are making a difference over here and it is what you hope and expect from American Soldiers. I tell my family that one IED in Baghdad is just that one. Not all of National League baseball is on steroids, and not all car races have a crash, but you wouldn't know it by what makes the headlines or runs on the TV.

On the media note, I very much enjoy the Bob Babcock file and hope you do to. I enjoy seeing news from across the Division and especially notes from the family members. Please take the time to look at the file and let Mr. Babcock know he is assisting us with every edition. We are not only very proud of the contribution 2-8 IN Soldiers make in this effort, but proud of all the units in 4ID, especially our Iraqi partners.

Recently, we had a FRG meeting via video teleconferencing (VTC). We all enjoyed the capability of seeing our hard-working FRG Leaders virtually face-to-face and plan to continue to utilize this capability at the company level. This will provide a special venue for our active FRG participants to get their updates directly from the command teams. This will require some coordination between CPT Hoffman and CPT Hills to schedule the VTC facility, but will primarily be coordinated by the Company Commander and the FRG Leader. We have also forecasted the VTC for 7 May a reenlistment VTC, where family members can virtually participate in their Soldiers' reenlistments.

Each of the company command teams will tell you in this newsletter about the great things their companies and Soldiers are doing. What they won't tell you is what a great job the company commanders and their outstanding 1SGs are doing. Our Company Commanders and First Sergeants are successfully waging a nested, full spectrum campaign to defeat and overcome all obstacles between the Iraqi government and Iraqi people. We cannot win this conflict by detaining insurgents and finding their weapons alone; we must exploit our gains in security matters along other lines – training the Iraqi Security Forces, educating and empowering the local, county, and provincial governments, and creating or sustaining a viable economy so that our energetic populace can expend their energies working for the future of Iraq. Each of our command teams is working along all lines and we are making progress.

Our companies have done a great job in the security area as you would expect from our outstanding Soldiers and leaders, but they are also doing great things as part of a much larger effort.

While we have always been working our full-spectrum operations, we are looking to turn a corner in our district. Each of our leaders has a hand in making progress across all lines of operations. CPT Brooks, CPT Simms and CPT Cook all work very closely with our Iraqi Security Force counterparts in the Iraqi Army. CPT Cook and his Soldiers live and work on an IA compound and have made great strides in assisting them with logistics and administrative functions as well as operations and training. CPT Simms has Soldiers living and operating with an Iraqi Army company at the Diyarrah Patrol Base where they conduct training and joint operations together. CPT Brooks has conducted an astounding number of joint operations with his IA Company partners in Haswah, all very successful, and that unit is now at the point where they are planning operations on their own. CPT Zaino and his company enjoy the partnership with the IA Scout Platoon who have accompanied them on numerous operations including air assaults.

We also work with the Iraqi Police. CPT Reed, C/2-8IN, has been working consistently with the Iraqi Highway Patrol and we have seen great improvement in their operations along the main supply route we patrol. We have also received a welcome addition to the Talon Team, elements from the 988th MP Company from 516th MP Battalion, who are the subject matter experts and primary trainers for all of our Iraqi Police. CPT Brooks and B/2-8IN also work closely with the IPs in Haswah and Iskandariyah. Our battalion staff meets twice a week with key members of all our ISF partners as we share information, techniques and procedures to enhance the security of AO Normandy. We even include an Iraqi Police district, who works in our area of interest but not in our area of operations, because they enjoy the mutually beneficial relationship or coordinating across boundaries. CPT Simms does not have any IPs to partner with just yet, but we are working on it. And last but not least, our unsung hero and master gunner, SFC Cowan, who must be the most powerful man in Iskandariyah because all the police answer to him. He is doing an absolutely exceptional job as our IP LNO, and our police forces have made great strides across the board because of his attention and efforts.

Our commanders and leaders are also active with the local governments. CPTs Brooks and Simms engage the city (Nahia) councils to ensure we are dovetailing our efforts with theirs. These councils are made up of very effective and civic-minded citizens that are attempting to steer their communities into the future. All of our projects are coordinated through the local governments, and this includes the local and regional sheiks. The sheiks are not a formal part of the representative government, but they are a major factor in the Iraqi culture. Our commanders are very good about knowing who these sheiks are and ensuring we get local “buy in” along our economic and security lines.

We recently delivered some agricultural supplies in one of our sheikdoms. CPT Brooks wisely deputized the sheik as the man in charge to receive, store, safeguard and distribute the much needed supplies called Rhodi Packs. Our sheik really stepped up to the plate organizing the entire effort from downloading the trucks to accounting for the supplies, to forming little Rhodi Packs for his families in his tribe, who all left with their goods and a big smile. Our sheik did credit to any 92Y.

Then there are our Talon Soldiers, our individual emissaries of U.S. resolve, justice and respect. Our Soldiers are ever Prepared, Polite and Professional, an apt phrase

we picked up from 2-11ACR. Each of our Soldiers, every day, is viewed and assessed by the Iraqi people and found worthy: we make progress every day. Our Soldiers, remaining vigilant, are out on the ground every day, alongside their Iraqi counterparts, setting the example and talking to the Iraqi people. While we will never completely win over the Iraqi people, individually they want us to stick around a while as they and their government get their feet under them and establish a firm base from which to take the next steps. None of them want us to leave until they are ready to take this effort completely on their own, and we will stay as long as it takes and not a day longer. We are making progress, and that, friends and family, is something you will not see on the news.

We are getting outstanding feedback from the leave program. The transportation is well coordinated, Soldiers and leaders, of course, are having a great time at home with their loved ones. What has been fantastic is the receptions our Soldiers get from great American volunteers, who at all stops at all hours, are in airports to welcome our Soldiers back on to American soil and to thank them for what they are doing. Our Soldiers are deeply moved by this reception, their appreciation and outpouring of support, and CSM Cervantes and I continue to hear about it. Pardon my cheap shot, but where are the news cameras recording this? Why is a roadside bomb going off nine time zones away so newsworthy when a patriotic American lady giving a hug to a U.S. Soldier coming home, or an entire 8th Grade class cheering debarking Soldiers, is not? Well the Soldiers appreciate it and I want to thank all those people for their efforts in making our homecoming so special. I also want to thank all those people for their kind letters and e-mails for their support. You are helping. You are supporting our troops and our family members and it is very much appreciated.

As I close, I want to thank everyone again for their kind support, from the letters and e-mails, packages and class projects, to the greeters and well-wishers at the transportation nodes. Your support means a great deal to each of us; so thank you for it!

Please pray for our families at home. They have the tougher mission and none of them should even be far from our thoughts.

FIRST AT NORMANDY

JAMES A. HOWARD
LTC, IN
Commanding